

# 2026

## VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE INNOVATION AWARDS

Enter on-line at [www.vml.org/Opportunities/Innovation-Awards](http://www.vml.org/Opportunities/Innovation-Awards).



RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE IN VIRGINIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT

# CALL FOR ENTRIES

# 2026 VML Innovation Awards

THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE'S INNOVATION AWARDS celebrate the programs and individuals that make it possible for our local governments to solve pressing problems, address emerging needs, and adapt to changing circumstances.

Local governments of all sizes are encouraged to compete for coveted Innovation Awards across seven categories. The **entries will be judged based on the scope and results of the project in relation to the community's size**, thereby putting all localities on a level playing field.

One of the seven category winners will be selected for the prestigious President's Award for Innovation. The winner of the President's Award will be revealed when all the award winners are honored during the Awards Banquet at the VML Annual Conference in Norfolk in October.

Don't miss this premiere opportunity to spotlight innovative programs that make your town, city or county a great place for people to call home!

## Criteria

Projects and programs are judged on how well they demonstrate the following:

- **Innovative problem solving**
- **Improved quality of life**
- **Excellence in management**
- **Making the most of local resources**
- **Increased citizen participation**
- **Long-term value to the community**
- **Adaptability to other communities**

Award-winning projects typically demonstrate innovative ways of delivering services, addressing community needs, or significantly improving an existing service.

## 2026 CATEGORIES

AWARD CATEGORIES are based on broad topics. As such, many projects relate to more than one category. The same project cannot be submitted for more than one category. When deciding what category best fits your project, consider the primary goal of the project and which components of the project demonstrate the greatest innovation.

Localities may submit only one entry in each of the seven following categories (i.e., a maximum of seven submissions total per locality):

### Community Health

Includes building healthy community environments through active lifestyle programs, nutrition education, and improving access to healthier food choices.

### Economic Development

Includes business development and retention; international competitiveness; infrastructure development and investment; planning, land use and zoning; blight; enterprise zones; housing; transportation; workforce development; and historic preservation.

### Environmental Quality

Includes natural resources and the authority of local governments to manage the environment, including water resources and quality, solid and hazardous waste management, air quality and the Chesapeake Bay.

### Public Safety

Includes police, fire, rescue services, emergency planning and coordinated response, building code enforcement, jails, health, and mental health related to public safety.

### Working with Youth

Includes civics education, pre-k-12 education, summer programs, parks and recreation, and literacy programs.

### Communications

Includes promotional campaigns, branding campaigns, crisis plans, events, customer service programs; media can include online, video, print, social and other formats..

### Risk Management

Includes a proactive process of identifying, assessing and mitigating a locality's risks. This includes but is not limited to fiscal and physical assets, information technology and data, governance and management.

# President's Award for Innovation

One winning project from the category winners will be selected for the top prize – the President's Award for Innovation – and will receive this top honor in addition to the award in their category. The President's award can come from any of the categories.

## Deadline

**All entries must be received via email by 5 p.m., Monday, Aug. 24, 2026.**

## Rules for entering

The competition is open to all VML local government members.

All entries must be submitted via email. Localities must download the entry form at [www.vml.org/Opportunities/Innovation-Awards](http://www.vml.org/Opportunities/Innovation-Awards) and fill in all of the requested information directly on the form. The completed form must then be emailed to [mtimbreza@vml.org](mailto:mtimbreza@vml.org).

Entries must cover **new projects** or programs completed between Jan. 1, 2025 and June 1, 2026. For **existing projects**, entries must cover **major enhancements** during the same time period.

Each entry form must be fully completed and must be signed by the local government's chief administrative or elected official.

A local government can only submit one entry in each of the seven categories. The President's Award for Innovation is not a separate category.

Supporting materials totaling no more than 10 pages, including photos, brochures, charts, or other information, can be included in a separate document. This document must be emailed as an attachment.

**NEW: The video component is now optional.** If you want to include a video, please provide a link to the video in your supporting materials. The video should be posted to a readily accessible website or platform (i.e., YouTube, Vimeo, etc.). The video should be no more than five minutes in duration.

## Judging

Entries are screened by VML staff and judged by individuals chosen for their expertise. The judges generally represent a variety of backgrounds. **Please note:** The scoring will remain confidential throughout the process.

## Winners

Winners in each category will be announced ahead of the Annual Conference happening October 10-13, at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott. The awards will be presented during the Awards Banquet on October 10 at which time the winner of the President's Award for Innovation will be revealed. All winning entries will also be featured in VML's magazine *Virginia Town & City*.

## Questions?

For more information about completing your entry or other details, contact Manuel Timbreza at [mtimbreza@vml.org](mailto:mtimbreza@vml.org) or call 804-649-8471.



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